

Police report for Parish Council meeting – 5th February 2026

My report is very sketchy because the situation is changing almost daily. The government is tabling bills looking at the whole setup of the police force in the land, its financing and equipping. The force boundaries are being redrawn, Police Commissioners being removed, manning levels changing, etc.

Here in Devon and Cornwall we have seen a significant increase of ‘bobbies on the beat’, police station enquiry offices being reopened, top heavy management being trimmed, etc. Matters of concern to the public are being addressed with action being taken towards ASB, crimes against females, night buses to reach out to the youngsters, and much much more. The Police Advocate scheme was launched and has grown to the extent that most communities have access to an Advocate. The Constabulary has been lifted out of being in special measures.

The full statement from the Police Commissioner is given here.

“Plans to create the biggest and most significant changes in policing this country has seen in years have begun and it cannot be underestimated how significant they will be for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Last week, the home secretary announced the government’s White Paper for reforming what she called the “broken” policing model in England and Wales. There are plans to create a new national police force and for new regional police forces to be created by merging existing forces. While it is clear improvements can and should be made in certain areas, I’d like to reassure people that Devon & Cornwall Police is far from “broken”.

Through the powers and scrutiny functions of myself and my office to hold the police to account, along with the great leadership of Chief Constable James Vaughan, our force continues to improve its performance.

In fact, the rules in which the police must function are largely the issue. From the complex bureaucracy of crime recording to producing a file to meet the standards of the Crown Prosecution Service, to court backlogs and the need for officers to create an audit trail for every action to justify everyday interactions, and also misconduct processes which are often onerous and lengthy.

All of these processes are generally developed by the government – not policing.

Devon & Cornwall Police is already the largest geographic police force in England with 4000 sq miles, the largest road network of 13,500 miles and 730 miles of coastline, with policing stretching 12 nautical miles out to sea. It has its own unique challenges including rurality, sparsity, and a significant seasonal influx of tourists.

What is so worrying about this is the potential for an erosion of democracy, of accountability and attention.

Let’s talk numbers. The government grant settlement for Devon and Cornwall has left the force with a budget shortfall of £3.1million on top of £6.5million planned efficiencies already to balance the budget for 2026-27. It is one of the lowest government funding settlements for policing nationally, with only four policing areas in England and Wales being left with less spending power - Cleveland, Greater Manchester, Norfolk and South Wales.

As 43 per cent of the funding for Devon and Cornwall police comes from council taxpayers, a far higher proportion than many other parts of the country, with the rest of the budget coming from central government, it is why I have had to increase the policing element of the police council tax bill by £15 a year for an average Band D property, after gaining approval from the Police and Crime Panel.

I was left with no choice but to ask taxpayers to pay more to bridge that shortfall from the government settlement. As of 2028, that duty, along with the democratic mandate that I have been given by the public for the last 10 years is to be abolished.

Police and Crime Commissioners are being replaced with either a mayor or a Police and Crime Board consisting of the leaders of our upper tier councils. In the absence of a mayor, in Devon and Cornwall this is likely to mean we have a board.

This will add a huge complex burden to already overstretched and overworked councillors and officers, especially those busy with Local Government Reorganisation. How can we expect policing and crime to be a priority?

I fear that the establishment of the National Police Service is a bureaucratic exercise.

It looks like it is the remaking of the National Police Improvement Agency that Theresa May abolished.

While it could give greater oversight by bringing several existing separate organisations into one, such as the College of Policing, Police Digital Service and Bluelight Commercial in the first instance, it will be years away from being a National Police Service that delivers operational policing, if indeed that ever happens given that part is planned after the lifetime of the current parliament.

A government commissioned independent review will report this summer on the number of regional forces and their boundaries. This could see Devon and Cornwall merging with other police forces, but the funding formula won't be altered until post mergers and restructuring.

Yet the way the police funding is allocated is the biggest impact the government could have if it reviewed it. The last three times a government tried to do this it failed. I can only surmise it's because in every iteration the Metropolitan Police loses out and smaller rural forces gain.

I have long been very vocal about my criticisms of the Police Funding Formula, which has built in over many years unfairness in how police forces are funded, with the consequence that some local communities pay more, but receive less.

At the same time, local government reform will lead to changes to our council boundaries and the government has indicated that a consultation on its preferred option is likely to start next month and also report in the summer, I believe.

The government has said that "in considering the optimal configuration of police forces...consideration will be given to alignment with other public sector boundaries". In other words, both the size of our police force, and the size of the councils, are going to change significantly, possibly at the same time and in a way that tries to achieve similar boundaries.

I don't believe the policing reforms will make our streets visibly safer anytime soon - and quite likely never at all - and will have little impact on everyday crimes that affect our lives.

It is vital all residents in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are kept updated about the changes in the white paper and it is why an information page is being made available on my office's website which will have the latest news for people to access over the coming weeks and months.

In the meantime, I would like to assure residents that it remains business as usual and that both the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and Devon & Cornwall Police will continue to listen and act in your best interests and deliver on our priorities of tackling violence, antisocial behaviour, drugs and alcohol and theft."

1. Alison Hernandez, has written to the Home Secretary and the Policing Minister raising serious concerns about the government's proposed policing funding settlement for 2026–27.

The PCC has warned that the settlement leaves Devon & Cornwall Police facing a projected budget shortfall of around £3 million next year, even if council tax is increased to the maximum level permitted. Despite being one of the most financially stable police forces in the country, Devon and Cornwall has received one of the lowest provisional funding settlements nationally.

Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner Alison Hernandez said: "Across England and Wales the average grant increase for policing is 3.3 per cent. However, in Devon and Cornwall, based on information provided so far, that figure is estimated to be 2.3 per cent. Only three policing areas in England have had a lower provisional settlement than Devon and Cornwall. This leaves an anticipated shortfall of around £3 million."

Despite delivering more than £6 million in planned efficiencies next year, the PCC says any funding gap may affect the ability of the Chief Constable to maintain policing services at current levels.

Over recent years, Devon and Cornwall has strongly supported the government's drive to increase police officer numbers. As a result, officer numbers now stand at a record 3,610. However, the PCC says the new provisional settlement appears to effectively penalise the force for this success by removing base funding for those officers.

2. The PCC also highlighted long-standing issues with the police funding formula which continues to fail rural and coastal areas. Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly face unique challenges including rurality, sparsity, and a significant seasonal influx of tourists, yet will receive one per cent less grant funding than the national average increase.
3. The shake-up of police forces that the Home Secretary is looking at are somewhat general and wide ranging. The measures have also not yet been discussed with the Chief Constables. Such measures to include all police officers to hold a "licence to practice" renewable every few years and reducing the number of police forces. The situation is so fluid at the moment that I cannot give any meaningful report to this meeting.

4. We have been made aware of cold callers offering guttering and roofing services in Devon & Cornwall recently.

If you want work done in your home or garden please consider the following advice:

- Don't agree to work offered by unsolicited doorstep callers.
- Don't rely on posts or recommendations on social media sites without doing your own research.
- Don't be swayed by glossy flyers or impressive websites as they may not show the trader's own work.
- Don't pay cash or agree to be taken to the bank or immediately transfer money before any work is started.
- Don't be rushed into making a decision.

Do:

- Get three written quotes from reputable businesses.
- Research the companies you're looking to use e.g. ask for references and look online.
- Ask friends and family to recommend local traders or search via Buy with confidence
- Decide who to use in your own time and make sure you have confidence in their skills and abilities.
- Ask to see professional qualifications, public liability insurance and if applicable waste carriers licence.
- Make sure you have full contact details for a tradesperson not just a mobile phone number.
- Check if you're entitled to your 14-day cooling-off period

If someone knocks on your door and you are not sure, don't open the door.

If you are concerned someone is at risk, always call the police.

If you are concerned rogue traders are operating in your area, always report it.

If a company claims to be working with a local council, contact the local council yourself to check this is true.

5. Several cases of anti-social behaviour have been passed to me especially one concerning a young mother and her child being harassed in the street. All incidents have been passed to the police. I urge anyone who has an issue to make to report it to the police on 101 or 999 if urgent and life-threatening.
6. Improved support for survivors of rape and sexual abuse report has just been published. Details available on line.